



## **Staff Report**

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### **AUTOMATED RED LIGHT PHOTO ENFORCEMENT PROJECT - UPDATE**

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

#### **Summary**

On May 27, 2010 Belmont Police Officers began issuing citations utilizing the Red Light Photo Enforcement program, following the required thirty day warning period. Between that date and March 1, 2011 the department has issued over two thousand citations at the two approaches based on evidence gathered from the photo enforcement system. This report was created in order to update the City Council on the effectiveness of the program.

#### **Background**

On February 12, 2008 the Belmont City Council passed resolution number 9975, authorizing the City Manager to enter into a contract with Redflex Traffic Systems for automated red light photo enforcement systems. This resolution followed five staff reports before council beginning in February of 2006 and culminating with a public hearing on September 25, 2007 (in compliance with §21455.5 CVC). In April 2010 the Belmont City Council offered direction regarding the system before the 30 day warning period began, and asked the Police Department to report back on the effectiveness of the program. In late May 2010 the system was activated and citations began to be issued.

#### **Discussion**

Based on staff analysis, two locations were chosen for the application of automated red light photo enforcement, Eastbound Ralston Avenue at El Camino Real (SR-82) and Westbound Ralston Avenue at Old County Road. As noted in previous staff reports, both of the locations are high-volume intersections:

##### **Ralston Ave & El Camino Real (SR-82):**

- Ralston: Approx. 29,722 vehicles per day
- El Camino: Approx. 34,000 vehicles per day

##### **Ralston Ave & Old County Rd:**

- Ralston Ave: Approx. 32,352 vehicles per day
- Old County Rd: Approx. 11,591 vehicles per day

Between May 27, 2010 and March 1, 2011 the photo enforcement system has identified nearly 3000 potential violations at these two intersections (2958). Of those potential violations, 1199

were rejected by Redflex or Belmont Police Officers who review and approve all citations. That rejection rate is within expected norms for well managed systems. Those rejections occur for a number of reasons (poor quality photo, unable to ID driver, sun glare etc.). The remaining 1759 drivers were issued citations through the courts. That number equates to just over six violations per day that are being cited by means of evidence collected by the photo enforcement system.

Both of these intersections are difficult to enforce through conventional means, due to their configuration and layout. There are no locations where an officer can monitor the intersections in a car and limited locations where enforcement can be carried out by a motorcycle officer. Utilization of automated red light photo enforcement at these locations allows for re-deployment of limited traffic enforcement resources to other areas. For that reason we are seeing more effective traffic enforcement in the rest of the City, resulting in more moving violation citations citywide.

There have been very few complaints from citizens about this program, including those cited for violations. Police staff members have been subpoenaed to testify in traffic court in just 40 cases. The vast majority of those cases resulted in guilty verdicts, but on occasion judges have taken the cases “under advisement”, which means that verdicts are not announced in open court. Those verdicts are not readily available to staff.

In February 2011 the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) produced a study which found that red light cameras reduced fatal collisions by 24% (IIHS Status Report Vol. 46, No. 1). Staff has been examining Belmont collision rates since the onset on this program. At this time the sample size is too small to draw material conclusions; however it appears at first glance that Belmont collision rates have been positively affected by the red light camera program. In 2009 there were twelve combined collisions reported within the two intersections. In 2010 that number dropped to ten, and in the first two months of 2011 there have been none. Of course, the red light system is but one of many variables that could contribute to these statistics such as weather, traffic patterns, and volume. Thus we are not prepared to claim that the system is solely responsible for the decrease in collisions at these two intersections, but it may well be a contributing factor.

### **General Plan/Vision Statement**

The Red Light Photo Enforcement Program furthers the Belmont Vision Statement, adopted October 2003 as outlined below:

### **Key Value - Easy Mobility**

- We put a priority on getting out of, into, and through town efficiently.
- Bicyclists, walkers, and other non-drivers get where they're going easily and safely.
- We require safe residential streets and smooth-flowing thoroughfares.

**Fiscal Impact**

Revenue is being collected monthly from the courts. It was slow to arrive at first, as there is sometimes a significant lag time between the date that citations are issued, drivers receive notices, court dates are set, fines are imposed and paid, and payments are processed through the courts. That lag time forced revenue to arrive slowly until late summer when the court processing caught up with the lag time. Since then, revenues have stabilized as the program has matured. By the end of the current fiscal year, revenues are projected to be sufficient to fund the operating costs of the program.

**Public Contact**

Posting on the City Council Agenda.

**Recommendation**

This report is an informational update to the Council and no action is required.

**Alternatives**

1. Provide other direction to staff.
2. Take no action.

**Attachments:**

None

Respectfully submitted,

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